DECLARATION

I, Mboyo Di Tamba Willy Vangu declare that this research report (Patients seen at the University Hospital in Johannesburg: their views on truth telling) is submitted for assessment for the MscMed (Bioethics & Health Law) course. It is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise. I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others. It is being submitted for the degree of MscMed (Bioethics & Health Law) in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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M.D.T.H.W. VANGU Date

This research was approved by the committee for Research on Human Subjects, University of the Witwatersrand (protocol M080565) and was carried out in out patients clinics in the Johannesburg Hospital in 2008

DEDICATION

To Chantal, Mercy, Jolyne and Florentine with the hope that truth and honesty will continue to guide our path through life.

ABSTRACT

Truth telling forms part of the contemporary debate in clinical bioethics and centers around the right of the patient to know honest information concerning his or her medical condition / illness and the duty of the doctor to inform the patient of such.

Anecdotal evidence seems to imply that patients have concerns with the practice of truth-telling. Many often complain that they are not being informed and sometimes simply being ignored in matters that primarily concerns their health. On the other hand, there may be patients who do not to want a truthful answer to their health problems-they would in fact rather not know.

The aim of this study was to explore my intuition that patients who attend the Johannesburg General Hospital are not given full information about their condition(s) and / or treatment(s) although they would like to know.
The study explored the preferences of patients regarding the practice of truth telling and their attitudes toward truth telling in four out patient clinics of the Johannesburg General Hospital.

Four hundred and sixty five participants completed and retuned the questionnaire from four different out patient clinics, namely oncology, surgical (general surgery and orthopedics), medical (gastro, renal and general internal medicine) and the nuclear medicine unit that represented the mixed out patient clinic.
The majority of participants stated that the doctor had disclosed information about their condition (92.90%). Almost all participants were of the opinion that patients have the right to know about their condition (98.28%) and also that the doctor has the duty to inform them of their condition (98.02%).
If they were suffering from a serious condition, a higher percentage of participants (86.28%) would prefer to know about their condition while a small but significant percentage (13.72%) would prefer not to know. The vast majority of participants (96.64%) also preferred to know about information relating to their treatment in detail while a high percentage (87.83%) supported disclosure to relatives.
Variables such as gender, age and level of education did not seem to impact on the participants' opinions of the truth telling process with significance with the exception of

gender in relation with knowledge of one's condition (p=0.0176) and education with regard to opinions on the right of patients to disclosure (p=0.0430).

From the above results it can then be concluded that:

1. Participants in our study supported the right of patients to disclosure and the vast majority also felt that doctors have the duty to inform patients of their condition.

2. A significant percentage of participants felt that the level of information given to them was not satisfactory even when they have requested for more. This should be looked at and means for improvement should be sought.

3. A small but significant group did not support disclosure and must be respected as autonomous beings.

4. Gender seems to influence opinions of patients concerning their condition and education impacts on opinions relating to right of patients to disclosure of information.

5. To our appeasement, we found that patients attending the Johannesburg hospital are in fact given information about their condition. It is rather the quality and the quantity of information given that should be subject to scrutiny if we would like to move towards full disclosure in the process of truth telling in our institution.

6. Future studies should be considered to assess the attitudes of doctors towards disclosing, as well as further assess conflicting opinions in small group of patients by means of direct interviews.

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- I will not forget God who makes everything possible

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HPCSA	=	Health Professions Council of South Africa
CEO	=	Chief Executive Officer
SAS	=	Software as Service